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FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATCH

FROM : American Embassy, Benghazi — 64 DESP. NO.

TO : THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON. — August 19, 1959 DATE

REF : Benghazi's Despatch No. 61; Deptel 46. AF 8-1859 7-2859 AF ICA

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SUBJECT: Fezzan Road.

When I called on the Minister of Communications at his Benghazi office on August 18, he finally broached the subject of the Fezzan Road, which I believe was the principal reason for his request to see me again so soon after our conversation in Beida. He invited me to accompany him to Bou Grain near Sirte, to inspect the construction of the new Fezzan Road, 70 kilometers of which, he alleged, have already been completed. He assured me that my visit with him could be considered informal if I so desired, and, of course, entirely non-committal. He went on to say that the Fezzan Road had been a subject of considerable discussion in Libya and he felt both he and I should go to see with our own eyes what had been accomplished, how many men had been given employment, etc. He suggested September 1 as an appropriate date, leaving Benghazi in the afternoon, spending the night in Sirte, and proceeding on to inspect the road the next morning with luncheon on the site (to be provided by Essayed Abdullah Abed Sanussi, Chairman of SAASCO), and return to Benghazi that afternoon.

I replied that I would be very interested indeed to visit an all-Libyan project such as the new construction of the Fezzan Road; that I had had an opportunity to visit various construction projects in Libya in which the United States was participating, and that I felt sure I would find it of equal interest to visit a project which was all Libyan in character. I proposed, however, that we postpone such a visit until late September, after I had returned from a visit to Tripoli and a holiday abroad.

The Minister was obviously disappointed at my deferral of the date and was insistent almost to the point of embarrassment that I find some period of 24 hours between now and the time I plan to visit Tripoli and then proceed on leave. He finally agreed, however, that we would leave the date open until my return to Benghazi the end of September. He did urge, however, that we visit the site before October. He included in his invitation Mr. Ben Hill Brown, Jr., Director of USOM/Libya and Mr. Mohammed Salah, the Embassy's Arab Secretary, who was acting as my interpreter during this interview. He added that he hoped that I would have no objection if motion pictures were taken of his and my visit to the site.

JWJones/grr
REPORTER

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As I took my leave the Minister assured me of his full "one hundred percent" cooperation with me as long as he is a government official, and of his personal friendship for me whenever he should revert to private life.

Comment: Mr. Brown and I had previously been invited, in much more general terms, by Abdullah Abed himself, to visit the Fezzan Road construction. While it will probably be difficult, if not impossible, to refuse indefinitely these invitations, I determined that neither of us would become involved in such a visit until after I had made the U.S. Government's position on non-participation in the present SAASCO contract for the Fezzan Road absolutely clear and final. I am seeking an interview with the Prime Minister in Beida this weekend to do just that. Since Nasir Kizza was obviously acting as spokesman for Abdullah Abed (who has just returned to Libya from abroad), it is possible that the latter will lose all interest in a visit of American officials to the Fezzan Road once he learns from the Prime Minister that there can be no American financial participation in the present contract.

J. Wesley Jones

cc American Embassy, Tripoli